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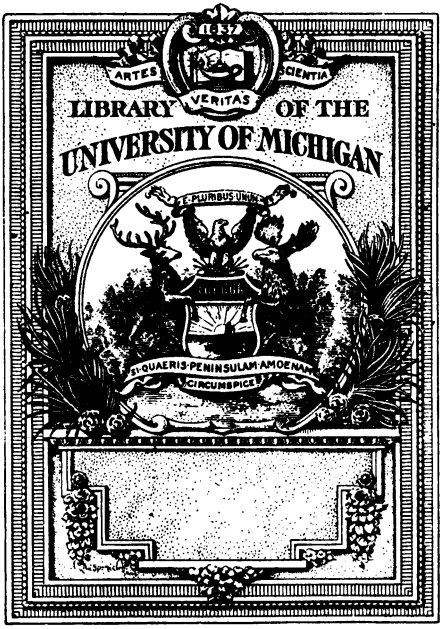
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CIRCUMSPICE

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The Deacon

The One Hoss Shay

With its Companion Poems

How the Old Horse Won the Bet

&

The Broomstick Train

By Oliver Wendell Holmes

With Illustrations by

Howard Pyle

Boston and New York

Houghton, Mifflin and Company

The Riverside Press, Cambridge

M DCCC XCII

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Preface

My publishers suggested the bringing together of the three poems here presented to the reader as being to some extent alike in their general character. "The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay" is a perfectly intelligible conception, whatever material difficulties it presents. It is conceivable that a being of an order superior to humanity should so understand the conditions of matter that he could construct a machine which should go to pieces, if not into its constituent atoms, at a given moment of the future. The mind may take a certain pleasure in this picture of the impossible. The event follows as a logical consequence of the presupposed condition of things.

There is a practical lesson to be got out of the story. Observation shows us in what point

191695

any particular mechanism is most likely to give way. In a wagon, for instance, the weak point is where the axle enters the hub or nave. When the wagon breaks down, three times out of four, I think, it is at this point that the accident occurs. The workman should see to it that this part should never give way; then find the next vulnerable place, and so on, until he arrives logically at the perfect result attained by the deacon.

Unquestionably there is something a little like extravagance in "How the Old Horse won the Bet," which taxes the credulity of experienced horsemen. Still there have been a good many surprises in the history of the turf and the trotting course.

The Godolphin Arabian was taken from ignoble drudgery to become the patriarch of the English racing stock.

Old Dutchman was transferred from between

the shafts of a cart to become a champion of the American trotters in his time.

"Old Blue," a famous Boston horse of the early decades of this century, was said to trot a mile in less than three minutes, but I do not find any exact record of his achievements.

Those who have followed the history of the American trotting horse are aware of the wonderful development of speed attained in these last years. The lowest time as yet recorded is by Maud S. in 2.08¾.

If there are any anachronisms or other inaccuracies in this story, the reader will please to remember that the narrator's memory is liable to be at fault, and if the event recorded interests him, will not worry over any little slips or stumbles.

The terrible witchcraft drama of 1692 has been seriously treated, as it well deserves to be.

Preface

The story has been told in two large volumes by the Rev. Charles Wentworth Upham, and in a small and more succinct volume, based upon his work, by his daughter-in-law, Caroline E. Upham.

The delusion commonly spoken of, as if it belonged to Salem, was more widely diffused through the towns of Essex County. Looking upon it as a pitiful and long dead and buried superstition, I trust my poem will no more offend the good people of Essex County than Tam O'Shanter worries the honest folk of Ayrshire.

The localities referred to are those with which I am familiar in my drives about Essex County.

O. W. H.

July, 1891.

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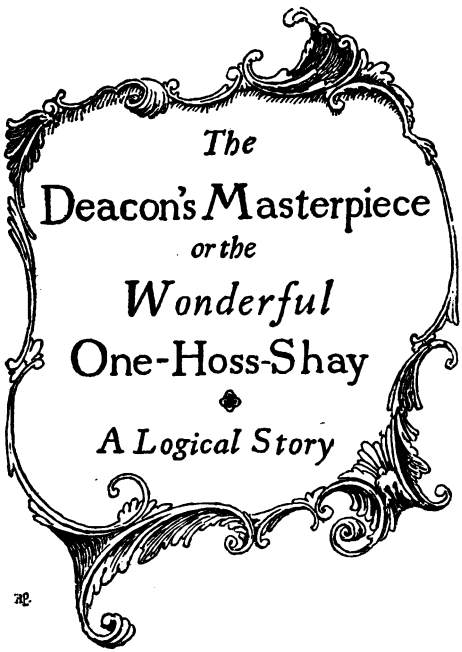
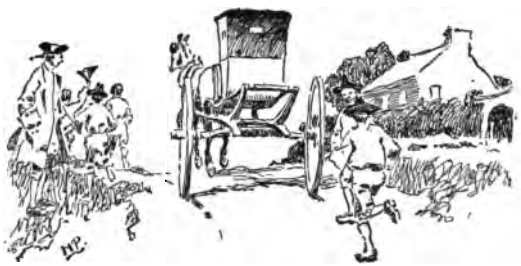

The
Deacon's Masterpiece
or the
Wonderful
One-Hoss-Shay
A Logical Story



The Deacon's Masterpiece

HAVE you heard of the wonderful one-hoss-
shay,
That was built in such a logical way
It ran a hundred years to a day,
And then, of a sudden, it — ah, but stay,
I 'll tell you what happened without delay,
Scaring the parson into fits,

Frightening people out of their wits, —
Have you ever heard of that, I say?

Seventeen hundred and fifty-five,
Georgius Secundus was then alive, —
Snuffy old drone from the German hive;
That was the year when Lisbon-town
Saw the earth open and gulp her down,
And Braddock's army was done so brown,
Left without a scalp to its crown.
It was on the terrible earthquake-day
That the Deacon finished the one-hoss-shay.

Now in building of chaises, I tell you what,
There is always *somewhere* a weakest spot, —
In hub, tire, felloe, in spring or thill,
In panel, or crossbar, or floor, or sill,

"A chaiſe breaks down
but doeſn't wear out"

In screw, bolt, thoroughbrace, — lurking still,
Find it somewhere you must and will, —
Above or below, or within or without, —
And that 's the reason, beyond a doubt,
A chaise *breaks down,* but does n't *wear out.*

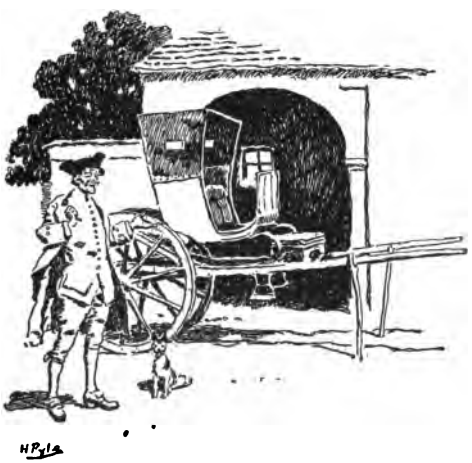
But the Deacon swore (as Deacons do,
With an " I dew vum," or an " I tell *yeou,*")
He would build one shay to beat the taown
'n' the keounty 'n' all the kentry raoun' ;
It should be so built that it *couldn'* break
daown !
— " Fur," said the Deacon, " 't 's mighty plain
Thut the weakes' place mus' stan' the strain ;
'n' the way t' fix it, uz I maintain,
Is only jest
T' make that place uz strong uz the rest."

So the Deacon inquired of the village folk
Where he could find the strongest oak,
That could n't be split nor bent nor broke,--

That was for spokes and floor and sills;
He sent for lancewood to make the thills;
The crossbars were ash, from the straightest
trees,
The panels of whitewood, that cuts like
cheese,
But lasts like iron for things like these;
The hubs of logs from the "Settler's
ellum," —
Last of its timber, — they could n't sell 'em,
Never an axe had seen their chips,
And the wedges flew from between their lips,
Their blunt ends frizzled like celery-tips;
Step and prop-iron, bolt and screw,
Spring, tire, axle, and linchpin too,
Steel of the finest, bright and blue;
Thoroughbrace bison-skin, thick and wide;

Boot, top, dasher, from tough old hide
Found in the pit when the tanner died.
That was the way he "put her through." —
"There!" said the Deacon, "naow she 'll
dew."

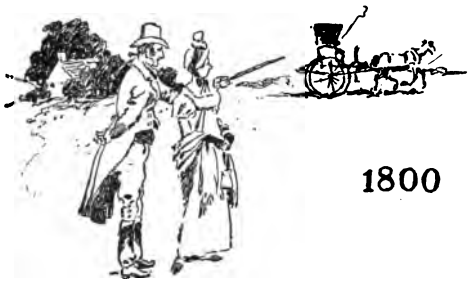
Do! I tell you, I rather guess
She was a wonder, and nothing less!



Pyle

"She was a wonder, and nothing less"

Colts grew horses, beards turned gray,
Deacon and deaconess dropped away,
Children and grandchildren — where were
they?
But there stood the stout old one-hoss-shay
As fresh as on Lisbon-earthquake-day!



EIGHTEEN HUNDRED ; — it came and found
The Deacon's Masterpiece strong and sound.
Eighteen hundred increased by ten ; —
" Hahnsum kerridge " they called it then.
Eighteen hundred and twenty came ; —
Running as usual ; much the same.
Thirty and forty at last arrive,
And then come fifty, and FIFTY-FIVE.

Little of all we value here
Wakes on the morn of its hundredth year
Without both feeling and looking queer.
In fact, there 's nothing that keeps its youth
So far as I know, but a tree and truth.
(This is a moral that runs at large;
Take it. — You 're welcome. — No extra
charge.)

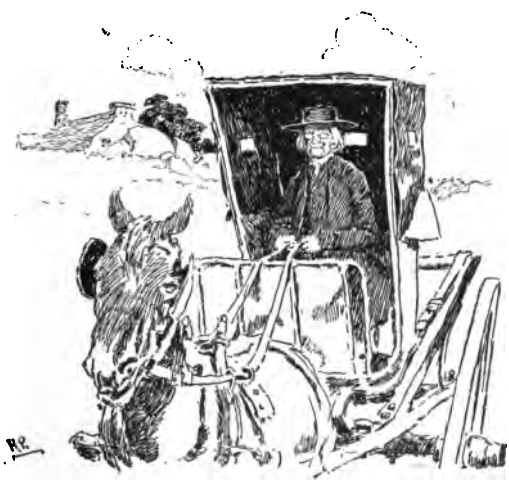
First of November, — the Earthquake-day. —

There are traces of age in the one-hoss-shay,
A general flavor of mild decay,
But nothing local, as one may say.

There could n't be, — for the Deacon's art
Had made it so like in every part
That there was n't a chance for one to start.
For the wheels were just as strong as the thills,
And the floor was just as strong as the sills,
And the panels just as strong as the floor,
And the whippletree neither less nor more,
And the back-crossbar as strong as the fore,
And spring and axle and hub *encore*,
And yet, *as a whole*, it is past a doubt
In another hour it will be *worn out !*

The Deacon's Masterpiece

First of November, 'Fifty-five!
This morning the parson takes a drive.
Now, small boys, get out of the way!
Here comes the wonderful one-hoss-shay,
Drawn by a rat-tailed, ewe-necked bay.
"Huddup!" said the parson. — Off went
they.

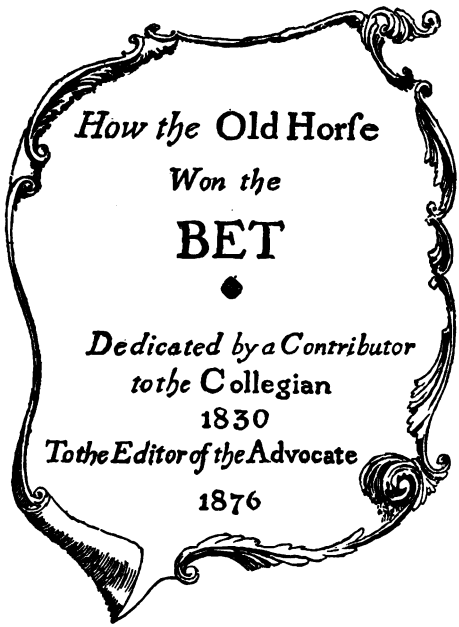


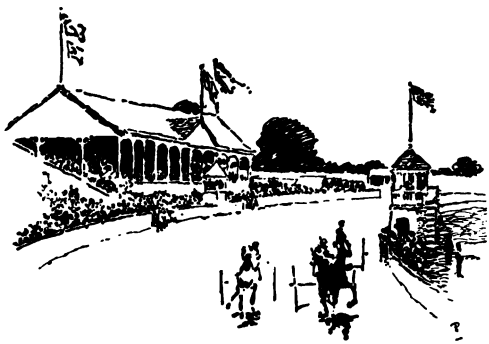
The parson was working his Sunday's text, —
Had got to *fifthly*, and stopped perplexed
At what the — Moses — was coming next.
All at once the horse stood still,
Close by the meet'n'-house on the hill.
— First a shiver, and then a thrill,
Then something decidedly like a spill, —

Then something decidedly like a spill

And the parson was sitting upon a rock,
At half-past nine by the meet'n'-house clock, —
Just the hour of the Earthquake shock!
— What do you think the parson found,
When he got up and stared around?
The poor old chaise in a heap or mound,
As if it had been to the mill and ground!
You see, of course, if you 're not a dunce,
How it went to pieces all at once, —
All at once, and nothing first, —
Just as bubbles do when they burst.

End of the wonderful one-hoss-shay.
Logic is logic. That 's all I say.


How the Old Horse
Won the
BET
Dedicated by a Contributor
to the Collegian
1830
To the Editor of the Advocate
1876



How the Old Horse Won the Bet

'T WAS on the famous trotting-ground,
The betting men were gathered round
From far and near; the "cracks" were there
Whose deeds the sporting prints declare:
The swift g. m., Old Hiram's nag,
The fleet s. h., Dan Pfeiffer's brag,

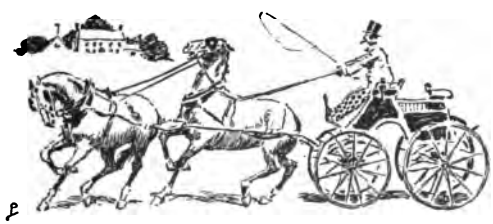
With these a third — and who is he
That stands beside his fast b. g. ?
Budd Doble, whose catarrhal name
So fills the nasal trump of fame.

There too stood many a noted steed
Of Messenger and Morgan breed ;
Green horses also, not a few ;
Unknown as yet what they could do ;
And all the hacks that know so well
The scourgings of the Sunday swell.

H.R.-16

The Sunday Swell

Blue are the skies of opening day ;
The bordering turf is green with May ;
The sunshine's golden gleam is thrown
On sorrel, chestnut, bay, and roan ;
The horses paw and prance and neigh,
Fillies and colts like kittens play,
And dance and toss their rippled manes
Shining and soft as silken skeins ;
Wagons and gigs are ranged about,
And fashion flaunts her gay turn-out ;
Here stands, — each youthful Jehu's dream, —
The jointed tandem, ticklish team !



And there in ampler breadth expand
The splendors of the four-in-hand;
On faultless ties and glossy tiles
The lovely bonnets beam their smiles;
(The style 's the man, so books avow;
The style 's the woman, anyhow;)
From flounces frothed with creamy lace
Peeps out the pug-dog's smutty face,
Or spaniel rolls his liquid eye,
Or stares the wiry pet of Skye;—
O woman, in your hours of ease
So shy with us, so free with these!

On faultleſs ties and gloſſy tiles
The lovely bonnets beam their ſmiles

"Come on! I 'll bet you two to one
I 'll make him do it!" "Will you? Done!"

What was it who was bound to do?
I did not hear and can't tell you, —
Pray listen till my story 's through.

Scarce noticed, back behind the rest,
By cart and wagon rudely prest,
The parson's lean and bony bay
Stood harnessed in his one-horse shay —
Lent to his sexton for the day ;
(A funeral — so the sexton said ;
His mother's uncle's wife was dead.)

Like Lazarus bid to Dives' feast,
So looked the poor forlorn old beast ;

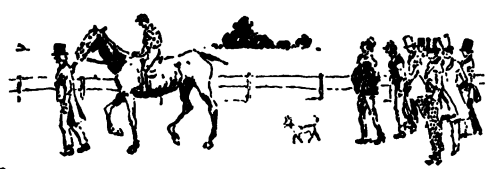
His coat was rough, his tail was bare,
The gray was sprinkled in his hair;
Sportsmen and jockeys knew him not,
And yet they say he once could trot
Among the fleetest of the town,
Till something cracked and broke him down, —
The steed's, the statesman's, common lot!
"And are we then so soon forgot?"
Ah me! I doubt if one of you
Has ever heard the name "Old Blue,"
Whose fame through all this region rung
In those old days when I was young!

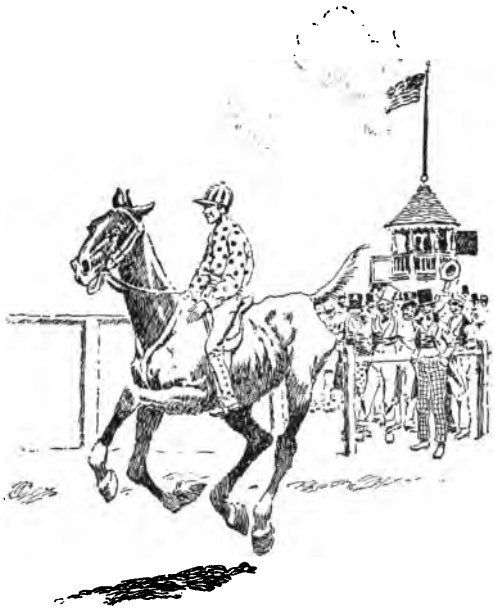
"Bring forth the horse!" Alas! he showed
Not like the one Mazeppa rode;

Scant-maned, sharp-backed, and shaky-kneed,
The wreck of what was once a steed,
Lips thin, eyes hollow, stiff in joints;
Yet not without his knowing points.
The sexton laughing in his sleeve,
As if 't were all a make-believe,
Led forth the horse, and as he laughed

Unhitched the breeching from a shaft,
Unclasped the rusty belt beneath,
Drew forth the snaffle from his teeth,
Slipped off his head-stall, set him free
From strap and rein, — a sight to see!

So worn, so lean in every limb,
It can't be they are saddling him!
It is! his back the pig-skin strides
And flaps his lank, rheumatic sides;
With look of mingled scorn and mirth
They buckle round the saddle-girth;
With horsey wink and saucy toss
A youngster throws his leg across,
And so, his rider on his back,
They lead him, limping, to the track,
Far up behind the starting-point,
To limber out each stiffened joint.





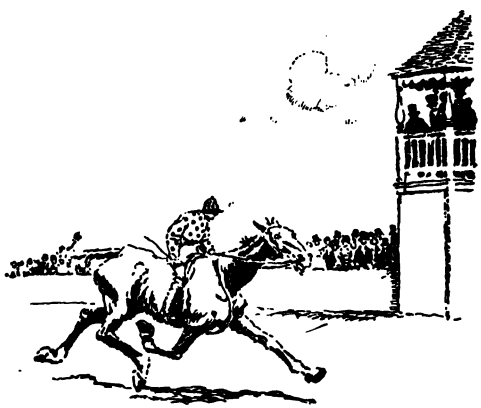
"To limber out each stiffened joint"

H. Pyle

As through the jeering crowd he past,
One pitying look old Hiram cast;
"Go it, ye cripple, while ye can!"
Cried out unsentimental Dan;
"A Fast-Day dinner for the crows!"
Budd Doble's scoffing shout arose.

Slowly, as when the walking-beam
First feels the gathering head of steam,
With warning cough and threatening wheeze
The stiff old charger crooks his knees;
At first with cautious step sedate,
As if he dragged a coach of state;
He's not a colt; he knows full well
That time is weight and sure to tell;
No horse so sturdy but he fears
The handicap of twenty years.

As through the throng on either hand
The old horse nears the judges' stand,
Beneath his jockey's feather-weight
He warms a little to his gait,
And now and then a step is tried
That hints of something like a stride.

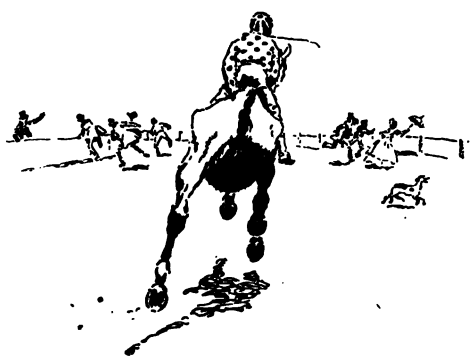


"Go!" — Through his ear the summons stung
As if a battle-trump had rung;
The slumbering instincts long unstirred
Start at the old familiar word;
It thrills like flame through every limb —
What mean his twenty years to him?
The savage blow his rider dealt
Fell on his hollow flanks unfelt;
The spur that pricked his staring hide
Unheeded tore his bleeding side;
Alike to him are spur and rein, —
He steps a five-year-old again!

Before the quarter pole was past,
Old Hiram said, "He 's going fast."

How the Old Horse Won

Long ere the quarter was a half,
The chuckling crowd had ceased to laugh;
Tighter his frightened jockey clung
As in a mighty stride he swung,
The gravel flying in his track,
His neck stretched out, his ears laid back,
His tail extended all the while
Behind him like a rat-tail file!



Off went a shoe, — away it spun,
Shot like a bullet from a gun ;
The quaking jockey shapes a prayer
From scraps of oaths he used to swear ;
He drops his whip, he drops his rein,
He clutches fiercely for a mane ;

He 'll lose his hold — he sways and reels —
He 'll slide beneath those trampling heels!
The knees of many a horseman quake,
The flowers on many a bonnet shake,
And shouts arise from left and right,
"Stick on! Stick on!" "Hould tight! Hould tight!"
"Cling round his neck and don't let go —
"That pace can't hold, — there! steady! whoa!"
But like the sable steed that bore
The spectral lover of Lenore,
His nostrils snorting foam and fire,
No stretch his bony limbs can tire;
And now the stand he rushes by,
And "Stop him! — stop him!" is the cry.

"And now the stand he rushes by"

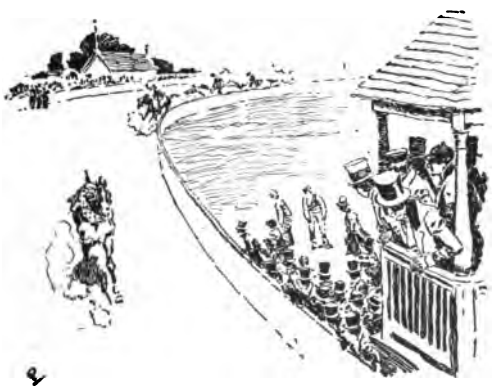
Stand back! he's only just begun, —
He's having out three heats in one!

"Don't rush in front! he'll smash your
brains;
But follow up and grab the reins!"
Old Hiram spoke. Dan Pfeiffer heard,
And sprang impatient at the word;
Budd Doble started on his bay,
Old Hiram followed on his gray,
And off they spring, and round they go,
The fast ones doing "all they know."

Look! twice they follow at his heels,
As round the circling course he wheels,
And whirls with him that clinging boy
Like Hector round the walls of Troy;
Still on, and on, the third time round!
They 're tailing off! they 're losing ground!

How the Old Horse Won

Budd Doble's nag begins to fail!
Dan Pfeiffer's sorrel whisks his tail!
And see! in spite of whip and shout,
Old Hiram's mare is giving out!
Now for the finish! at the turn,
The old horse — all the rest astern, —
Comes swinging in, with easy trot;
By Jove! he 's distanced all the lot!



That trot no mortal could explain ;
Some said, " Old Dutchman come again ! "
Some took his time, — at least they tried,
But what it was could none decide ;
One said he could n't understand
What happened to his second hand ;
One said 2.10 ; *that* could n't be —
More like two twenty two or three ;

Old Hiram settled it at last;
"The time was two — too dee-vel-ish fast!"

The parson's horse had won the bet;
It cost him something of a sweat;
Back in the one-hoss shay he went;
The parson wondered what it meant,
And murmured, with a mild surprise
And pleasant twinkle of the eyes,
"That funeral must have been a trick,
Or corpses drive at double-quick;
I should n't wonder, I declare,
If brother — Jehu — made the prayer!"

And this is all I have to say
About that tough old trotting bay.
Huddup! Huddup! G'lang! — Good-day!

"Back in the one-horse-shay he went"

Moral for which this tale is told :

A horse *can* trot, for all he's old.

The BROOMSTICK TRAIN or The Return of the WITCHES

The Broomstick Train

Look out! Look out, boys! Clear the track!
The witches are here! They've all come back!
They hanged them high, — No use! No use!
What cares a witch for a hangman's noose?
They buried them deep, but they would n't lie still,
For cats and witches are hard to kill;

They swore they should n't and would n't
die, —
Books said they did, but they lie ! they lie !

— A couple of hundred years, or so,
They had knocked about in the world below,
When an Essex Deacon dropped in to call,
And a homesick feeling seized them all ;
For he came from a place they knew full well,
And many a tale he had to tell.

They long to visit the haunts of men,
To see the old dwellings they knew again,
And ride on their broomsticks all around
Their wide domain of unhallowed ground.

In Essex county there 's many a roof
Well known to him of the cloven hoof;
The small square windows are full in view
Which the midnight hags went sailing through,

On their well-trained broomsticks mounted high,
Seen like shadows against the sky;
Crossing the track of owls and bats,
Hugging before them their coal-black cats.

Well did they know, those gray old wives,
The sights we see in our daily drives:
Shimmer of lake and shine of sea,
Brown's bare hill with its lonely tree,
(It was n't then as we see it now,
With one scant scalp-lock to shade its brow;)
Dusky nooks in the Essex woods,
Dark, dim, Dante-like solitudes,
Where the tree-toad watches the sinuous snake
Glide through his forests of fern and brake;

"Dark, dim, Dante-like solitudes"

Ipswich River ; its old stone bridge ;
Far off Andover's Indian Ridge,
And many a scene where history tells
Some shadow of bygone terror dwells, --
Of "Norman's Woe" with its tale of dread,

Of the Screeching Woman of Marblehead,
(The fearful story that turns men pale:
Don't bid me tell it, — my speech would fail.)

Who would not, will not, if he can,
Bathe in the breezes of fair Cape Ann, —
Rest in the bowers her bays enfold,
Loved by the sachems and squaws of old?
Home where the white magnolias bloom,

Sweet with the bayberry's chaste perfume,
Hugged by the woods and kissed by the sea!
Where is the Eden like to thee?

For that "couple of hundred years, or so,"
There had been no peace in the world below;
The witches still grumbling, "It is n't fair;
Come, give us a taste of the upper air!
We 've had enough of your sulphur springs,
And the evil odor that round them clings;
We long for a drink that is cool and nice, —
Great buckets of water with Wenham ice;

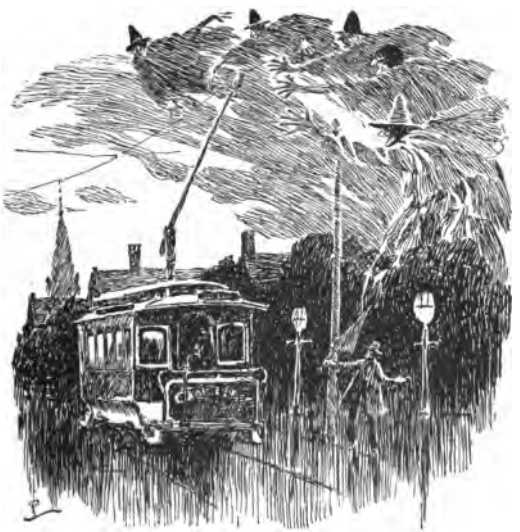
We 've served you well up-stairs, you know;
You 're a good old — fellow — come, let us
go!"

I don't feel sure of his being good,
But he happened to be in a pleasant mood, —
As fiends with their skins full sometimes
are, —
(He 'd been drinking with "roughs" at a
Boston bar.)
So what does he do but up and shout
To a graybeard turnkey, "Let 'em out!"

To mind his orders was all he knew;
The gates swung open, and out they flew
"Where are our broomsticks?" the beldams
cried.

"You're a good old-fellow-
come, let us go"

" Here are your broomsticks," an imp replied.
" They 've been in — the place you know —
so long
They smell of brimstone uncommon strong ;
But they 've gained by being left alone, —
Just look, and you 'll see how tall they 've
grown."



— "And where is my cat?" a vixen squalled.
"Yes, where are our cats?" the witches bawled,
And began to call them all by name:
As fast as they called the cats, they came:
There was bob-tailed Tommy and long-tailed Tim,
And wall-eyed Jacky and green-eyed Jim,
And splay-foot Benny and slim-legged Beau,
And Skinny and Squally, and Jerry and Joe,

And many another that came at call, —
It would take too long to count them all
All black, — one could hardly tell which was
which,
But every cat knew his own old witch ;
And she knew hers as hers knew her, —
Ah, did n't they curl their tails and purr !

No sooner the withered hags were free
Than out they swarmed for a midnight spree ;
I could n't tell all they did in rhymes,
But the Essex people had dreadful times.

"The withered hags were free"

The Swampscott fishermen still relate
How a strange sea-monster stole their bait;
How their nets were tangled in loops and knots,
And they found dead crabs in their lobster-pots.
Poor Danvers grieved for her blasted crops,
And Wilmington mourned over mildewed hops.
A blight played havoc with Beverly beans, —
It was all the work of those hateful queans!
A dreadful panic began at "Pride's,"
Where the witches stopped in their midnight rides,
And there rose strange rumors and vague alarms
'Mid the peaceful dwellers at Beverly Farms.

"A ſtrange ſea-monſter ſtole their bait"

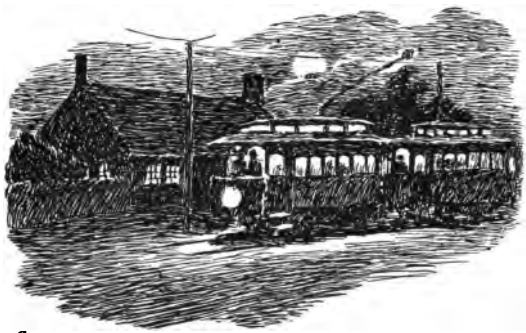
Now when the Boss of the Beldams found
That without his leave they were ramping
round,
He called, — they could hear him twenty miles,
From Chelsea beach to the Misery Isles;
The deafest old granny knew his tone
Without the trick of the telephone.

"Come here, you witches! Come here!"
says he, —
"At your games of old, without asking me!
I'll give you a little job to do
That will keep you stirring, you godless
crew!"

They came, of course, at their master's
call,
The witches, the broomsticks, the cats, and
all;

He led the hags to a railway train
The horses were trying to drag in vain.
"Now, then," says he, "you 've had your fun,
And here are the cars you 've got to run.
The driver may just unhitch his team,
We don't want horses, we don't want steam;
You may keep your old black cats to hug,
But the loaded train you 've got to lug."

Since then on many a car you 'll see
A broomstick plain as plain can be;
On every stick there 's a witch astride, —
The string you see to her leg is tied.
She will do a mischief if she can,
But the string is held by a careful man,
And whenever the evil-minded witch
Would cut some caper, he gives a twitch.



As for the hag, you can't see her,
But hark! you can hear her black cat's purr,
And now and then, as a car goes by,
You may catch a gleam from her wicked eye.

Often you 've looked on a rushing train,
But just what moved it was not so plain.
It could n't be those wires above,
For they could neither pull nor shove;
Where was the motor that made it go
You could n't guess, *but now you know.*

"Catch a gleam
from her wicked eye"

Remember my rhymes when you ride again
On the rattling rail by the broomstick train!

The End